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SUBJECT: READ-OUT OF IRAN TRIP BY EU ENVOY TO SOUTH CAUCASUS

Classified By: AMB Marie Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Peter Semneby, the EU's Special Representative to the South Caucasus, shared with the Ambassador a read-out of his December trip to Iran. Invited to Teheran by the Iranian government, Semneby said that Iranian authorities fear the recent revival of Turkish and Russian activity in the South Caucasus. Iranian officials also said they remain miffed by the deliberate omission of Iran from the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) that Turkey announced in August 2008, and urged its composition be recast to include Iran, the EU and perhaps -- "under certain conditions" -- even the United States, as a counter-balance to Iran's traditional rivals Russia and Turkey. The Ambassador told Semneby that Iran's overtures to the EU and the United States were interesting, particularly in light of the current review of Iran policy by the Administration, but that if left unresolved, Iran's intransigence on the nuclear issue would remain a stumbling block. END SUMMARY.

"SOUTH CAUCASUS IN FLUX"

12. (C) During his unannounced February 24-25 visit to Armenia, Peter Semneby, the EU's Special Representative to the South Caucasus, shared a read-out of his December trip to Teheran, where he had been invited by the Iranian government to discuss the South Caucasus. Semneby said the Iranians invited him to discuss the South Caucasus which is "in flux."

13. (C) Semneby said the Iranians told him they want to be more greatly involved in the South Caucasus, their, "historical sphere of interest," because they are concerned by the recent revival of diplomatic activity by their historical rivals in the region, Turkey and Russia. The officials said they seek other actors, such as the EU, with no history in the region, to counter-balance Ankara's and Moscow's revived engagement in the South Caucasus.

14. (C) The officials also complained about the deliberate omission of Iran from the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) that Ankara launched in August 2008. (NOTE: Ankara has presented the CSCP as a regional diplomatic forum where countries in the region can collectively discuss security issues. Turkey invited Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia to take part, and so far two rounds of CSCP consultations have occurred, the first at the OSCE ministerial in Helsinki in December, and the second in Ankara in late January. END NOTE) The officials said Iran wanted to be part of the CSCP and that alternative compositions should be considered, including a 3 plus 3 (that adds Iran), or a 3 plus 3 plus 1 (that adds Iran and the EU), or -- and "under certain conditions" -- a 3 plus 3 plus 2 (that adds Iran, the EU, and the United States). Semneby noted to the Ambassador that Armenia also has been placing more emphasis on its Iran

ties and trying to involve Iran more in the region, including in the CSCP.

15. (C) The Ambassador said that the Embassy maintains a dialogue with the Armenians on their relationship with Iran. She stated that Iran's overtures to the EU -- and potentially the United States to take a more prominent role -- and perhaps cooperate with Iran -- in the South Caucasus were very interesting. The Ambassador noted that the Administration was currently reviewing America's Iran policy, and it was still too early to predict the outcome of that review. The Ambassador stressed, however, that the requirement for Iran to comply with its international obligations regarding its illicit nuclear program would almost certainly continue to be a major policy concern for the United States.

YOVANOVITCH